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Senior Honor's Thesis in the Department of History

Sweet Briar College

Defended and Approved 17 April 2006

The Politics of Virtue:

Christine de Pizan's Gendered

Body Politic and its Practical Applications

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Medieval women are most commonly described in relation to their husbands and fathers. Because men had legal, political and economic power over them, women are frequently seen as having been the pawns of the men in their lives. More and more, however, scholars are finding that this portrait of weakness and malleability does not apply, as can be seen in the case of the two late medieval women discussed in this paper: Christine de Pizan (1365-1430), a fifteenth century writer, and Isabeau de Bavière (1370-1435), the French queen in whose court Christine wrote.

Had it not been for a confluence of circumstance, both Christine and Isabeau would have lived out their lives in the relative obscurity that most of their contemporaries enjoyed. Both clearly intelligent and politically adept, they only became unusual figures due to the support of and then absence of their husbands. Christine's husband and father encouraged her intellectual study and early exposure to humanism. Their influence, along with Christine's early widowhood, prompted her writing career, which constitutes perhaps the first instance of a woman in Western Europe supporting herself and her family through writing. Similarly, the effective absence of Charles VI of the Valois (r. 1380-1422), caused Isabeau's unusual position. Charles empowered his wife's control of the French government in his stead. While it is difficult to say how much the influence the royal court had over Christine's political theory, one can see how Christine applied her political theory to the goings-on of the court in a 1405 letter of political advice to the queen.

Christine represents a number of "firsts" in early-modern European society. She was the first woman writer to support herself solely with her pen, and in fact appears to be one of the first professional writers of either gender in European society. By using



Latinate syntactical structures with a French vocabulary, she encouraged the development of the vernacular. She was also the first secular woman to defend her sex against men's criticism in a manner that is not complicit with the idea of woman's inferiority,<sup>1</sup> which recent scholars have used as the basis for showing that Christine was the first writer to make the distinction between the concepts of sex and gender in the roughly same manner as do modern feminist theorists.<sup>2</sup>

Christine, whose historical significance lies in her position as a pivotal figure, straddles the line separating the Middle Ages from the Renaissance. While her father had exposed her to humanist ideas, she was also well versed in medieval traditions, scholarship and theory. For example, as shall be discussed in chapter III, she took the medieval ideals of kingship and gave them a new, humanistic perspective. Just as she blended Latin and French to further develop the vernacular French language, she used a medieval vocabulary, words like *chivalry* and *prudence*, in an innovative manner to create new ideas while still seeming to conform to the medieval thought with which her contemporaries would have been comfortable.

As a child Christine was surrounded by the politics and learning of the French court of Charles V (r. 1365-1380). However, she was not raised to be a political writer. Instead, she seems to have had a relatively normal existence for a girl of her social class.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Abelard, the eleventh century theologian, presents such a "defense": "If we seek out afresh from the very beginning of the world the favours or honour shown by divine grace to women, we shall immediately discover a certain dignity enhancing woman's creation, since she was made in paradise, but man outside it." Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1992) 235-6. For Christine's view of Eve, see Thelma Fenster, "Simplece et sagesse : Christine de Pizan et Isotta de Nogarola sur la culpabilité d'Eve," in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Âge*, Liliane Dulac et Bernard Ribémont, eds. (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995) 481-495.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Joan Kelly identifies Christine as the first in a series of early modern feminists. These "early feminists focus upon what we would now call gender. That is, they had a sure sense that the sexes are culturally, not just biologically formed." Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*" in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 67.



Charles V invited her father, Tommaso di Pizzanno, an astrologer and doctor who trained at the University of Bologna, to be an advisor in the Parisian court soon after Christine's birth. In Christine's autobiographical writings, she describes having had a happy childhood, although she later wished that she had been able to receive more schooling.<sup>3</sup> At fifteen, she married Étienne de Castel, a young court notary. Theirs was an apparently happy marriage, and two of their three children, Marie and Jean, lived past childhood. Étienne died in 1390, shortly after the death of Christine's father. She was left with little property and was the sole supporter of her two children, niece, and mother. In the course of the next ten years, she fought numerous court battles to untangle her late husband's legal affairs. Slowly, Christine developed her interest in scholarship, undoubtedly aided by her release from housewifely duties. Her interest in poetry blossomed into a study of the *ballade*, the *virelay*, and the *rondeau*, three complex poetic forms, leading her to publish her *Cent Ballades* in 1402.

Christine transformed her writing career from that of a court poet by writing about cultural perceptions of women.<sup>4</sup> This discussion began with remarks that she made in two allegorical poems, *L'Épistre au dieu d'amours* (1399) and the *Le Dit de la rose* (1402). After she participated in the epistolary debate regarding the *Roman de la Rose*, called the *querelle de la Rose* (1401-1403), she wrote *Le Livre de la cité des dames*

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<sup>3</sup> Christine's autobiographical works are the *Christine's Vision*, Glenda McLeod, trans. (New York: Garland, 1993) and *Le Livre de la mutacion de fortune*, Suzanne Solente, ed. (Paris A. & J. Picard, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> According to Sheila Delany, this is a necessary step in the early modern world for a woman's writing to be accepted in male-dominated intelligentsia; indeed, Mary Anne Case notes that Christine became "feminist" in her fight to be heard and to be allowed to participate in the masculine intellectual sphere. Sheila Delany, *Writing Women: Women writers and women in literature, medieval to modern* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) 24; Mary Anne C. Case, "Christine de Pizan and the Authority of Experience," in *Christine de Pizan and the categories of difference*, Marilyn Desmond, ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 82.





(1405), a universal history of women, and *Le Livre des trois vertus*, a behavior guide for contemporary women (1405-6).

Having been commissioned to write the official biography of Charles V in 1404, Christine wrote increasingly more works on political topics, including *Le Livre du corps de policie* (1407), a mirror for the *dauphin* of France; *Le Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* (1410), a handbook on chivalric warfare; and *Le Livre de la paix* (1414), which urged the French rulers to create peace after France's civil war (1410-13) and during the Hundred Year's War with England. She retired from public life in 1418, and likely resided thereafter in the convent at Poissy where her daughter lived. In 1429 she came out of retirement to write the only secular contemporary account of Jehanne d'Arc to be completed before Jehanne's death in 1431.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand the significance of Christine's philosophy vis-à-vis women, it is necessary to understand the nature of male criticism of women, or misogyny. According to R. Howard Bloch, misogyny is a "constant" that involves the "ritual denunciation of women."<sup>6</sup> While the nearly total disenfranchisement of women in medieval society should not be ignored, he applies the term *misogyny* only to the literary topos rather than to institutionalized discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

Women have been considered morally inferior to men in Western literature since its beginning. According to the Jahvist Creation myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition,

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<sup>5</sup> While the date of Christine's death is unknown, Willard hopes that Christine did not live to see Jehanne's trial and subsequent burning. Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984) 207.

<sup>6</sup> R. Howard Bloch, "Medieval Misogyny," *Representations* 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry and Misanthropy (Autumn 1987) 1. See also Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: U Chicago P. 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Bloch (1987) 8-9. To delineate the use of the word as a verbal device rather than to refer to an action, he noted, now famously, that misogyny is "a speech act such that the subject of the sentence is woman and the predicate is a more general term." Bloch (1987) 22 n. 15.



Eve was made from the rib of Adam, and was thus a part of him and not considered to have been made in the image of God, as was Adam.<sup>8</sup> Augustine of Hippo later assigned her responsibility for the Fall and for original sin.<sup>9</sup> In the Christian Scriptures, Paul sets the antifeminist tone for the new religion by making it clear that women were second-class citizens, even in worship, despite his own comments to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

The Church Fathers, who argued that woman is antithetical to a spiritual life,<sup>11</sup> accepted Aristotle's opinions on women, particularly his theory of gender binary, which says that men and women are opposites, and that women are in fact deformed men and thus imperfect. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, "*male* and *female* were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy, and order/disorder."<sup>12</sup> Thus misogyny is a major theme in Western philosophical thought regarding woman; to quote an authority on women is likely to quote a misogynist one.<sup>13</sup>

Humanism, which existed in intellectual circles in France from the middle of the fourteenth century, seems to have encouraged Christine to dispute the long-standing tradition of misogyny. writings on women, monarchy and power. Charles V encouraged the spread of humanism in France, as evidenced by the many written works in the

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:21-24 and 3:10-20.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Elizabeth A. Clark, *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Whilst in Galatians, Paul confirms the spiritual equality of women (Galatians 3:28), he later asserts that this equality does not extend to the earthly realm: women were banned from authority within church communities (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

<sup>11</sup> Jerome was particularly virulent on this point. Cf. Blamires (1992) 63-77.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, quoted in Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about gender: the diversity of medieval perspectives," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, Jennifer Carpenter and Sally Beth MacLean, eds. (Urbana : U of Illinois P, 1995) 3.

<sup>13</sup> Marjorie Curry Woods shows that in fact many of the Latin texts read by schoolboys during the Middle Ages, which concerned the permissibility of rape, were racier than the fare considered acceptable for adult consumption. Because male children learned these misogynistic precepts along with their alphabet, they took them as equally authoritative. Marjorie Curry Woods, "Rape and the Pedagogical rhetoric of Sexual Violence," *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge UP, 1996) 56-86.



vernacular that he had commissioned to be translated or created. In addition, Charles actively sought out humanist advisors. According to Bridget Buettner, by “laying the foundations for a veritable state humanism, the king and his brothers appointed clerics steeped in classical studies to key positions in major chancelleries.”<sup>14</sup> Charles V also selected as a court advisor Tommaso di Pizzano, Christine’s father, for his humanistic training and connections with humanists at the prestigious University of Bologna, rather than the particular qualities that he many have possessed.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that his successor, Charles VI, had no clear program of artistic or cultural patronage, humanism nevertheless continued to spread. The pope’s continued residence in Avignon aided French humanists’ development, as Petrarch, who is considered the father of humanism, also resided there from 1326 until his death in 1353.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the Great Schism provided the opportunity for French intellectuals to make contacts with Italian humanists.<sup>17</sup>

Much of Christine’s work reflects this burgeoning humanism. It appears that she was able to read Italian, her native tongue,<sup>18</sup> which provided her access to the Italian

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<sup>14</sup> Brigitte Buettner, “Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in late Medieval Courtly Society,” 74 *The Art Bulletin* 1 (March 1992) 75.

<sup>15</sup> Willard (1984) 20.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Ullmann, *A short history of the papacy in the Middle Ages* (London : Methuen, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Jillian M. L. Hill, *The Medieval Debate on Jean de Meung’s Roman de la Rose: Morality versus art* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen P. 1991) 145-6. For example, Jean de Montreuil, considered a leading early French humanist, began a literary exchange with Colluccio Salutati, the Florentine chancellor from 1375 to 1406, after his mission in 1384. Gontier Col conducted a similar exchange with Giovanni Moccia, a papal secretary. They also corresponded with their countrymen who were posted in Italy: Nicolas de Clamages, who was a papal secretary from 1397-1407, as well as Laurent de Premierfait, who is among one of the primary early French humanists.

<sup>18</sup> Christine recommends to Pierre Col “if you wish to hear paradise and hell described more subtly and theologically, portrayed more advantageously, poetically, and efficaciously, read the book of Dante, or have it explained to you, because it is written splendidly in the Florentine language.” (*Christine de Pizan 2 October 1402*. 138). Cf. Anna Slerca, “Dante, Boccace, et *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* de Christine de Pizan,” in *Une femme de letters au moyen age* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995) 221-232. I cite Christine’s letters in the *querelle de la Rose* as follows: Christine wrote a letter to each of her interlocutors (*Christine de Pizan Summer 1401*; *Christine de Pizan October 1401*; *Christine de Pizan 2 October 1402*), and sent copies of the proceedings of the debate along with letters to Isabeau de Bavière, Queen of France (I



humanist authors that influenced her works.<sup>19</sup> In examining Christine's humanist credentials, Richards applies two criteria pertinent to the distinction between a medieval courtly outlook versus Christine's humanistic one: the reflection of "a war-ridden and disintegrating late-medieval society versus a concept of a desired Renaissance social order of peace and Christian justice," and the second is "opposed ideas of woman's nature and potential role in society."<sup>20</sup> Richards applies these criteria to Christine's biography of Charles V, which fits the first criterion and to all of Christine's works regarding women, which he notes fit the latter.<sup>21</sup>

Prompted by early humanism, Christine's works on women allowed her to explore the interplay of gender, monarchy and power. In the *querelle de la Rose*, an epistolary debate that treated moral and misogynistic themes found in *Le Roman de la Rose*, Christine examined the *roman's* moral message, and argued against the misogynistic and immoral message found in it. She denied male writers the authority to write about women, and said that it was because of works such as the *Rose* that men treat women poorly. Because the *Rose* was considered a *summa*, Christine's criticism of it specifically shows the universality of her condemnation of misogyny.

Christine continued to build her argument in a fully developed defense of women in *Le Livre de la cité des dames*. Answering literary misogyny in kind, Christine developed the idea of women's virtue. She placed virtuous women from throughout history—from biblical women to her contemporaries—into an allegorical city. While she

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*Christine de Pizan 1 February 1401*) and Guillaume de Tignonville, the Provost of Paris (2 *Christine de Pizan 1 February 1401*). John L. Baird and John Robe Kane, eds. *La Querelle de la Rose: letters and documents* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Willard (1984) 93, 102. For example, *L'Epistre d'Othéa* and the *Chemin de la Longue Estude* reveal Dante's influence.

<sup>20</sup> Earl Jeffery Richards, "Christine de Pizan, the Conventions of Courtly Diction, and Italian Humanism," in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, Earl Jeffery Richards, ed. (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1992) 257.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*





rewrote the stories in Boccaccio's (date) *De Claris Mulieribus* (date) to create the stories of pre-Christian women, she owes the structure of the allegorical city of ladies to Augustine of Hippo's *City of God*.

Christine intended the *Trois Vertus* (1406), a companion piece to the *Cité des dames*, to teach all women how they might themselves come to be worthy of being as citizens of it. Much of the work concerns the role and behavior of noblewomen, who are supposed to govern by good example. This is largely because Christine dedicated the work to the future queen of France, Marguerite de Bourgogne (1398-1442), duchesse de Guyenne, for whom her father, the duc de Bourgogne, commissioned the work. Even though the details of palace and estate management – for example, assuring that the workers in the field do not cheat their lords – do not apply to women from the lower classes, the moral lessons taught to the noblewomen apply across the social spectrum.

While most of her works seem to celebrate women as rulers, the *Livre des trois vertus* features women in their traditional roles mother and wife. To scholars looking at Christine's works on women, the *Trois vertus* has seemed reactionary. The manner in which to characterize Christine's treatment of the Woman Question<sup>22</sup> in her works has recently been a source of much disputation among medieval scholars. The following quotation from Collette Beaune's study of the birth of the idea of the nation seems to aptly pertain to scholarly application of the word *feminism* to Christine's era: "The appropriateness of modern vocabulary to medieval reality probably indicates that our

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<sup>22</sup> The *querelle de la Rose* is considered the earliest iteration of the *querelle des femmes*, also known as the Woman Question in the English tradition, which is the centuries long debate that occurred in early-modern Europe regarding women's position in society.



modern ideas are a poor match for a time and place so profoundly different from our own."<sup>23</sup>

In 1982, at the beginning of serious scholarly interest on Christine, both Joan Kelly-Gadol and Richards labeled her a "feminist." Kelly-Gadol characterized her as a "feminist thinker," who "sparked [...] the *querelle des femmes*." She was the first in a series of literate early-modern women who "felt themselves and all women maligned and oppressed by [secular] culture, but who were empowered by it at the same time to speak out in their defense."<sup>24</sup> Richards went so far as to describe her as "revolutionary" and to compare her use of Christian doctrine with the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>25</sup>

Sheila Delany, a Marxist-feminist who primarily studies the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, describes Richards's introduction as "nearly hagiographical," and cautions her readers that Christine was not, "even by the standards of her own day, a reformer or a proto-feminist." In fact, she disdains Christine for views that seem anti-feminist: "I have been repulsed by the backwardness of her social attitudes, attitudes already obsolescent in the early fifteenth century when Christine lived and wrote." She referred to Christine as the "Phyllis Schaflý of the Middle Ages" and criticized Richards for his comparison of Christine's methods to those employed by Dr. King, seemingly condemning both as pacifistic and unrevolutionary.<sup>26</sup>

Maureen Quilligan reproached Delany for her "virulent attack" on Christine's "reactionary politics," even though she agrees that Christine's conservative "politics are a

<sup>23</sup> Collette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late Medieval France*, Susan Ross Huston, trans. (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991) 5.

<sup>24</sup> Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes', 1400-1789," *Signs*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1982) 5.

<sup>25</sup> Earl Jeffrey Richards, "Introduction," *Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan (New York: Persea Books, 1982) xxvix.

<sup>26</sup> Sheila Delany, "'Mothers to Think Back Through': Who are they? The Ambiguous Case of Christine de Pizan," *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester UP, 1990b) 88-103.



major part of her oeuvre.” Quilligan takes Delany to task for her denunciation of the pacifist politics of both Dr. King and Christine as “passive resistance and political martyrdom are not [...] politically dismissible because authorized by a sentimental Christianity.”<sup>27</sup>

Rosalind Brown-Grant carefully assigns Christine a title that she would have likely assigned herself—that of “defender of women.”<sup>28</sup> In *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women*, Brown-Grant posits that Christine, using a “moral defence of women,” empowers them by encouraging the practice of “moral self-edification.” Brown-Grant’s argument is implicitly founded upon the idea that Christine sees women as moral creatures.<sup>29</sup> However, because of Christine’s position in the French court and her later political tracts, for us to better understand her stance of women, it is necessary to examine her discussion of women in light of her political writings.

Scholars of medieval political theory have only begun to examine Christine’s political philosophy. Christine’s political writings have long been seen simply as the translation or restatement of earlier political works. In Margaret Brabant’s seminal collection, Eric Hicks identifies historians’ silence as ahistorical scholarship.<sup>30</sup> As with feminism, scholars had impressed a modern political context onto Christine’s early-modern political thought, and she thus appeared reactionary, as Delany had claimed.

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<sup>27</sup> Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan’s Cité des Dames* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991) 7-9.

<sup>28</sup> Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women: Reading beyond gender* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Brown-Grant is not the only recent scholar to qualify Christine’s writings about women in light of historical context. Cf. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition,” *Romanic Review*, 54 (1990) 3: 279-292; Christine Reno, “Christine de Pizan: Feminism and Irony,” *Seconda miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese*, Franco Simone, Jonathan Beck, Gianni Mombello, eds. (Chambéry/Torino: Centre d’Études Franco Italien, 1981) 129-32.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Hicks, “The Political Significance of Christine de Pizan,” in *Politics, Gender & Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, Margaret Brabant, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview P, 1992) 7-14.



When viewed in the context of fifteenth-century political scholarship, one can see how Christine employed earlier political thought in order to craft a message that would be meaningful to her contemporaries. In *Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, Kate Forhan Langdon situates Christine's treatment of the body politic in her later works in its historical context. She shows that Christine innovatively used her analysis of the body politic to plead the rulers for peace during both France's Civil War and its Hundred Years' War with England.<sup>31</sup>

Christine uses the familiar structure of the body politic as a way to convey the idea of a *gendered* body politic, in which woman are politically central and active.<sup>32</sup> Tsae Lan Lee Dow, who looked at the political message contained in Christine's early works, states that Christine found that the male and female bodies politic exist in a quasi-marital relationship—the kingdom is based on the happy marriage of these bodies politic.<sup>33</sup> However, an earlier instance of Christine's application of her gendered body politic occurred during the turmoil of Isabeau's reign.

Christine's political thought was greatly influenced by her observations of the politically unstable court of the queen of France, Isabeau de Bavière. Born Elisabeth Wittselbach in 1370 in Munich, she was the daughter of Stephan III, duke of Bavaria, and Thaddea Visconti, a daughter of the duke of Milan. Isabeau's family traced their lineage to Charlemagne; the Holy Roman Emperor Ludwig IV, elected in 1314, was Isabeau's

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Forhan Langdon, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> While Dow makes the distinction between the male and female bodies politic, I use the term *gendered* body politic to denote that these two bodies politic co-exist and rely on each other. She stresses that while the ideas are prominent and shaped into a cohesive theory, Christine never acknowledges the theoretical existence of a female body politic. Tsae Lan Lee Dow, "Christine de Pizan and the Body Politic," in *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, Karen Green and Constant J. Mews, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005) 227-244.

<sup>33</sup> Dow then applies this theory to the *Diuié de Jeanne d'Arc*, in which the figure of Jehanne embodies both the male and female bodies politic.





grandfather. In 1385, she traveled to France to meet Charles VI. Unbeknownst to her was her status as perspective bride for the young king. It must have come as quite a surprise when, upon arriving in Paris on Friday July 14, 1385, she was married three days later. She and Charles had twelve children, many of whom did not survive to adulthood.<sup>34</sup>

The course of Isabeau's queenship changed dramatically when her husband began showing symptoms of schizophrenia in 1393. She spent the following thirty years attempting to protect the crown for her husband and children. By 1415, she lost all political autonomy to Jean de Bourgogne, and in 1420 signed the Treaty of Troyes, which gave the regency of France after the death of Charles VI to her son-in-law, Henry V of England, rather than to her son, Charles VII. After the death of Charles VI in 1422, she was stripped of her treasury, and relegated to living in obscurity and poverty until her death in 1435. The traditional view of Isabeau – corrupt, lustful, and fickle – has recently come under scrutiny. Rachel C. Gibbons has shown that these labels are unfair and largely based on contemporary propaganda and politics.<sup>35</sup>

Following the opinions of Isabeau's French contemporaries, historians often portray Isabeau as corrupt and greedy. However, Gibbons asserts that while Isabeau's crime was in fact her close association with the duke d'Orléans at the same time that he was extorting money from the king. The royal treasury was restructured after 1393, and the queen's treasury, normally a portion of the king's set aside for her personal use, became the central governmental treasury. Items for which the king had traditionally

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<sup>34</sup> See Rachel C. Gibbons, "The Queen as 'social mannequin': Consumerism and expenditure at the Court of Isabeau of Bavaria, 1393-1422," 26 *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (December 2000) 374.

<sup>35</sup> Rachel C. Gibbons, "Isabeau of Bavaria. Queen of France (1385-1422): The Creation of an Historical Villainess (The Alexander Prize Essay)," 6 *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1996a) 51-73.



paid, such as ceremonial finery, were now paid for by the queen.<sup>36</sup> Thus it appeared to the public that she was spending more than had her predecessors.

Accusations against the queen for sexual misconduct seem to stem from an attempt to explain her political actions without considering Isabeau's own agency and motivation. It is often hinted that she had an affair with Louis d'Orléans because, at first glance, no other explanation seems plausible for her turn from the duke de Bourgogne in 1404. Charity Cannon Willard echoes this interpretation of events by linking "the court dominated by the lusty Isabeau of Bavaria and the all-too-charming Louis of Orleans."<sup>37</sup> However, Ricardo Famiglietti shows that this reputation did not develop until her son's enemies tried to cast doubts on his parentage after Isabeau's death, and that in fact she turned from the duke de Bourgogne with the death of the old duke, Philippe, and the inheritance of the title by his son, Jean, whom she did not trust.<sup>38</sup>

Isabeau's political alliance practices are often seen as fickle because she did not consistently ally herself with a single side of the conflict that would eventually become civil war. Gibbons has established that Isabeau's central loyalty was not to any of the royal dukes, but was rather to the immediate royal family. She protected the political power of the king and *dauphin*, and made decisions based on her understanding of how they would affect her family, rather than from a sense of loyalty to one side or the other.<sup>39</sup>

Rachel Gibbons has examined many of the assumptions that scholars have made when looking at Isabeau's reign. They have taken the opinions of her contemporaries for

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<sup>36</sup> Gibbons (1996a).

<sup>37</sup> Willard (1984) 61.

<sup>38</sup> Ricardo Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI 1392-1420* (New York: AMS P, 1986) 44.

<sup>39</sup> Rachel C. Gibbons, "Les conciliatrices au bas Moyen Âge : Isabeau de Bavière et la guerre civile (1401-1415)," *La Guerre, la violence et les gens au Moyen Âge*, Philippe Contamine et Olivier Guyotjeannin, eds. (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1996b).



granted and, most egregiously, have examined Isabeau's political decisions only as reactions to the male members of the royal court. Like Louise d'Arcens, I applied the distinction found in the canonical tradition between *potestas*, or formal power, and *auctoritas*, or informal power, as a means of examining medieval French queenship and Isabeau's reign.<sup>40</sup> The canon law scholar Stephan Kuttner has defined *potestas* as "a legally-recognized force to command, forbid and enforce," that is naturally possessed by kings, who also have *auctoritas*, or "the dignity of an office or institution that empowers its incumbent to certain acts."<sup>41</sup> The king routinely bestows *auctoritas* but not *potestas*, which is his particular right to rule. It is important to note the difference in the two applications of the dichotomy: unlike the canonists, I followed to recent tradition that acknowledges that queens were in a position to wield a good deal of informal political power.

This paper seeks to expand our understanding of Christine as a political thinker by first analyzing her development of a gendered concept of the body politic and women's political function more fully in her early works. Christine's vision of the body politic is found in her three major works on women, the *querelle de la Rose*, *Le Livre de la cite des dames*, and *Le Livre des trois vertus*. Women's natural virtue gives them a very specific role in the body politic. This theory of the gendered body politic is different from the

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<sup>40</sup> Louise D'Arcens, "Petit estat vesval: Christine de Pizan's Greiving Body Politic," in *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005) 203.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Kuttner, "On 'Auctoritas' in the Writing of Medieval Canonists: The Vocabulary of Gratian," in *La notion d'autorité au moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident: Colloques Internationaux de la Napoule. Session des 23-26 octobre 1978*, George Makdisi, Dominique Sordel, Janine Sordel-Thomine, eds. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982) 79. See also Alan Cottrell, "Auctoritas and potestas: A Re-evaluation of Gelasius I on Papal-Imperial Relations," 55 *Medieval Studies* (1993) 95-109.



typical medieval power paradigm: it seems that Christine was the first to express the idea of a “female” body politic.

This paper also examines how Christine applied the theory of the gendered body politic in her early works. After crafting this theory by observing the politics of the French court, her biography of Charles V most notably delineates the qualities that should constitute the male body politics. She then applied it to Isabeau’s power negotiations in the *epistre*, a letter of unsolicited advice to the queen written during a political crisis in 1405 that has received little scholarly attention. This is the first analysis to use both the theory of the gendered body politic and revisionist analyses of medieval queenship and Isabeau’s reign as a lens through which to examine this letter.

Isabeau’s experience as queen was very different from that of her predecessors. These women acted as secondary rulers, using informal power, or power that has not been officially mandated, to influence the members of the court, particularly the king, and political events in order to benefit the body politic. Due to the unusual situation of Charles’s illness, the king gave Isabeau extraordinary formal political power, or officially mandated responsibilities. Because of Isabeau’s ineffectiveness as a mediator, and the body politic was plunged into civil war, even though she nonetheless managed to retain the throne for her husband.

Christine examined the court’s *ad hoc* distribution of power through the lens of her political theory. She applied her theory of the gendered body politic to Isabeau’s political role during a crisis that seems to have been a watershed event in Isabeau’s political career. Christine saw that earlier queens were effective mediators, and concluded that Isabeau’s inefficacy as a mediator was due to the formal power that she had been





given, since her predecessors had been able to mediate effectively in the absence of a formal role.



## Chapter I: Virtue as the foundation of the gendered body politic

Christine began writing political works in 1407. However, she expressed her political views in three earlier, ostensibly non-political works composed between 1401 and 1406. In the *querelle de la Rose*, the *Cité des dames*, and the *Livre des trois vertus*, Christine defended her sex against misogyny. She responded to the misogynists, who said that women are immoral and therefore inferior to men, by presenting women as the moral, though not automatically social, equal of men. Christine's defense of women carries a political dimension as well. She argued that women complement men in the political order; while men rule, women serve as peacemakers.

Christine assessed the literary offenses propagated by two misogynists. First, she attacked Jean de Meun's use of literature in the *Roman de la Rose*. She, like most medieval readers, expected literature to present a moral lesson, and found de Meun's *roman* to be immoral. She then transformed Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* into the *Cité des Dames*. She removed the immoral teachings about women and transformed his negative portrayal of them. After having asserted that women possess natural virtue in the *querelle* and in the *Cité des dames*,<sup>42</sup> Christine showed how women may properly apply virtue in every day life. In the *Trois Vertus*, she in particular analyzed the behavior of queens, since the elites constituted her intended audience.

Even though these three works -- the *querelle*, the *Cité des dames*, and the *Trois vertus* -- were not overtly political, Christine still showcased the political implications of

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<sup>42</sup> Christine's implied definition of *virtue* as the sum of several different moral qualities that, when combined, create an ethic by which to live. The limits of these moral qualities are delineated by Christian doctrine. As it was to Thomas Aquinas, virtue is a specific moral quality or action that encourages moral living. Thomas Aquinas, *The Pocket Aquinas*, Vernon J. Bourke, ed. (New York: Washington Square P, 1960) 204.



her defense of women. She argued that women form a body politic of their own that complements that of men. Due to their inherent virtue, women are naturally peacemakers. A queen, as the head of this female body politic, has the obligation to negotiate between her husband, the king, and other lords. This chapter will examine the way that Christine portrays politically active women in these three early works, and will show that this portrayal of women creates a cohesive political theory that gives women a central and vital role.

Christine disputed Jean de Meun's misogynistic portrayal of women in the *querelle de la Rose*, an exchange that occurred between five Parisian intellectuals. Jean Gerson (1362-1428), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, strongly supported Christine's complaints that the work was morally reprehensible.<sup>43</sup> Three royal secretaries—Jean de Montreuil, and Pierre and Gontier Col—supported the *Rose*. Christine contributed six letters to the debate, by far the most of any single participant, as the collected letters of this *querelle* includes two treatises,<sup>44</sup> excerpts from three sermons, and sixteen letters.<sup>45</sup>

*Le Roman de la Rose* was one of the most popular vernacular works of the thirteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Two different poets wrote it: Guillaume de Lorris (fl. 1230-35) wrote the first 4,000 lines around 1235, and Jean de Meun (d. 1305) finished the poem between 1275 and 1280 and added some 17,000 lines. While the first portion is an allegory of

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<sup>43</sup> Hill (1991) 113-14.

<sup>44</sup> The treatise of Jean de Montreuil is no longer extant, although a reconstruction of its contents can be found in Peter Potansky, *Der Streit den Rosenroman* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972).

<sup>45</sup> Christine's letters constitute 38% of the total text (52 pages of Christine's work out of 137 pages total). This figure includes the excerpts from the *Epistre* in Baird and Kane's addition. Because Jean de Montreuil's treatise is no longer extant, this figure is slightly misleading. Baird and Kane (1978).

<sup>46</sup> According to C. S. Lewis, it was "the most important literary phenomenon of the later Middle Ages," which "ranks second to none except the Bible and the *Consolation of Philosophy*." Qtd. Maxwell Luria, *A Reader's Guide to the Roman de la Rose* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String P. 1982) 4.



courtly love modeled after Ovid's *Ars Amoris*,<sup>47</sup> Jean de Meun's part satirizes this courtly love model.<sup>48</sup> During the Middle Ages, French thinkers considered the poem a *summa* in which de Meun had compiled the most current ideas on love and on related subjects, including women. It can thus be regarded as containing the collected knowledge of medieval thinkers on women.<sup>49</sup>

The *Roman de la Rose* is the allegorical quest of *Amant* ("Lover") for his idealized love, the Rose, who is being kept in a castle built by Jealousy and guarded by an Old Woman. Along the way, *Amant* meets several characters who either try to aid him along or dissuade him from his quest, including the overbearing Jealous Husband, who demonstrates that love does not thrive under dominance (ll. 7231-10,000). In the end, the lover is able to break through the defenses surrounding the Rose and pluck her (ll. 20704-21775).

To Christine, the clearest manifestation of misogyny in the *Rose* appears in the Jealous Husband, who describes women as stereotypically greedy and lacking morals: all are unfaithful and grasping. He insists that men should not tell their wives their secrets because women cannot keep a secret. In contrast, Christine argues that Jean de Meun underestimates women's loyalty to their husbands, and she observes that the number of "men accused, killed, hanged, and publicly rebuked by the accusations of their women" is

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<sup>47</sup> An allegory is a sustained metaphor, in which there is a surface narrative as well as a deeper interpretation. Joesph R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 11 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988) 179-84.

<sup>48</sup> Luria (1982) 48-58. Courtly love is a literary mode that began in Southern France in the end of the eleventh century, whereby the lover is dedicated to the wife of his lord; ideally it was a relationship based on sexual desire but not fulfillment. As it translates in allegory, courtly love serves as a guide for moral living. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 3:667-670.

<sup>49</sup> Willard (1984) 77. A *summa* is a "large [compilation] of established opinion on a particular subject." *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 11:57.





less than Jean de Meun proposes. In fact, she thinks that “you will find them few and far between” (*Christine de Pizan Summer 1401*, 51).

Christine condemns the *Rose* because she believes Jean de Meun did not intend to include a significant moral message, and, moreover, that it teaches its readers to make immoral choices. She argues that all works should have a moral purpose, which the style of the text should clearly indicate. Christine compares the way that de Meun describes immoral behavior to language used in the Bible. The language in Genesis that describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is very harsh. De Meun, on the other hand, uses “invented or soft, alluring words which support and sustain treachery, heresy, and other evils.” Thus de Meun’s “evils [should be] condemned in such a way that they sound unpleasant to all those who hear” (*Christine de Pizan 2 October 1402*, 131).<sup>50</sup>

Not only does the *Rose* encourage immoral behavior, but Christine claims that the *roman* also teaches ways in which to practice it. She insists that “one should not suppose that to encourage and praise evil is to teach one to guard himself against it” (*Christine de Pizan to Pierre Col* 137). Indeed, “a man who describes an evil way of making counterfeit money or how someone has done so, he teaches it rightly enough.” She concludes that Jean de Meun, rather than to discouraging the practice by demonstrating its nefarious reality, “did it for no other purpose than to admit the assailants” into the castle (*Christine de Pizan to Pierre Col* 134). Thus to Christine, Jean de Meun’s purpose in demonstrating seduction was to teach its method rather than its antidote.

To further emphasize the detrimental effect of Jean de Meun’s “teaching,” Christine mentions a reader who followed its example:

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<sup>50</sup> Genesis 19.



A married man who believed in the *Roman de la Rose* as in the gospel, [...], whenever in the grip of passion, would go and find the book and read it to his wife; then he would become violent and strike her and say such horrible things as, "These are the kinds of tricks you pull on me. This good, wise Master Jean de Meun knew well what women are capable of." And at every word he finds appropriate, he gives her a couple of kicks or slaps. Thus it seems clear to me that whatever other people think of this book, this poor woman pays too high a price for it (*Christine de Pizan to Pierre Col*, 136).

Christine shows that the teachings concerning the *Rose* of immoral behavior in fact bring about the mistreatment of women.

Christine condemns the *Rose* for its immorality and its misogyny. It furthers cultural stereotypes that label women as immoral. Due to its reliance on learned male authority, the *Rose* represents the misogynistic tradition. In addition, the immorality it displays encourages the abuse and disrespect of women. Through her criticism of the *Rose*, as well as to prove herself a worthy rhetorician, Christine laid the groundwork for her view that women are virtuous, which she then incorporated into a political message regarding women.

Having disputed the misogynistic vision of women in the *querelle*, she proclaimed women's morality in the *Cité des dames*, applying the medieval emphasis on morality in literature to Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*. While in the *querelle*, Christine merely criticizes Jean de Meun's moral stance, the *Cité des dames* allows her to rewrite Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*.<sup>51</sup> In so doing, she was able to use her literary ethic and to develop a message of women's morality.

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<sup>51</sup> Written 1361-1375 concurrent with the completion of the *Decameron*, the *De Claris Mulieribus* is a catalogue of only pagan women. Boccaccio lists the deeds of over one hundred women. This work was ostensibly meant as a moral guide. For a more complete discussion of Boccaccio's portrayal of women, see Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P. 1991) 59-80.



In early 1405, Christine wrote *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, a universal history of women. In the *Cité des dames*, Christine inserts herself as a narrating character, a device that she employs so that the narrator can engage in direct dialogue with the other characters. The book opens with Christine reading a book by the thirteenth century poet Matholeus, in which he argues that women use trickery in order to make men's lives miserable.<sup>52</sup> She despairs that she was born a woman rather than a man. Three allegorical ladies, the Three Virtues—*Raison*, *Droiture* and *Justice*<sup>53</sup>—appear to her. The Ladies defend women's virtue, and in doing so, aid Christine in building an allegorical city for women. Lady *Raison* describes virtuous Roman women in the first book. These women, who were primarily creators, include Sappho, Medea, Circe, Minerva, and Isis. In the second book, Lady *Droiture* tells Christine about other pre-Christian women and their virtuous actions. The third book, in which Christine converses with Lady *Justice*, concerns Christian women, most of whom were martyrs. Finally, the Virgin Mary, the queen of Heaven takes her place as the natural ruler of a city of ladies, is led into the city.<sup>54</sup>

The allegorical figures of the Three Virtues present Christine's expectations for her sex. *Raison* in book I discusses virtuous pagan women, *Droiture* shows virtuous domestic women in Book II, and *Justice* in Book III discusses virtuous Christian women. According to Rosalind Brown-Grant, the women's actions serve similar functions in the realms that they inhabit: "whilst in Book I, women's role has been to provide language

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<sup>52</sup> Blamires (1992) 177–179.

<sup>53</sup> These Virtues are a compilation of both the Christian Virtues as well as the Cardinal Virtues.

<sup>54</sup> I have primarily cited from Rosalind Brown-Grant's translation of the *Cité des dames* (New York: Penguin, 1999), rather than from Richards's more frequently cited edition (New York: Persea Books, 1982) because I feel that Brown-Grant more closely follows the spirit of Christine's complex prose in a way that Richards' literal translation does not. I have also consulted Curnow's critical edition (Vanderbilt, 1975) when necessary.



and laws by which to save a people from bestiality, [...] in Book III, women's language has the spiritual function of rescuing souls of individual believers from damnation." These virtuous women saved people in both the spiritual and in the earthly realms. Book II shows women how they might use such virtue in their everyday experience; it domesticates the grandiose acts of virtue that Christine proffers as *exempla*.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Droiture "brings us more mundane but more pervasive examples of service by focusing on women in the home. She also places that domesticity within a communal and public context."<sup>56</sup>

Christine changes Boccaccio's collection of biographies into a universal history, one of the highly esteemed forms of medieval literature. Christine had previously employed the genre in her *Mutacion de Fortune* (1403), in which she personifies history and treats it as the central character of the book.<sup>57</sup> The most prominent universal history of the Middle Ages was Otto Freising's (d. 1158) *History of the Two Cities*, which, "inspired directly by Augustine's *City of God*, is the fullest example of the Christian synthesis which traces the course of human history from the Creation to the Last Judgment."<sup>58</sup> The scope of Christine's universal history of women is no less broad: the Virtues recite historical examples in a roughly chronological manner from the pre-Roman empress Nicaula to the early medieval Christian saints. This series of women that shows their virtue throughout time. To Christine, the deeds of St. Christine, who lived in the first millennium CE, are as valid examples as those of virtuous womanhood as the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.169.

<sup>56</sup> McLeod (1991) 128.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Brownlee, "The Image of History in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*," *Yale French Studies*, No. 80.

<sup>58</sup> Eva Matthews Sanford, "The Study of Ancient History in the Middle Ages," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan., 1944) 33.





Amazon women, who were pre-Christian. Christine had a linear view of history, and, like most of her contemporaries, thought that civilization was progressing. She emphasizes the accomplishments of women in history who had improved civilization, such as Nicostrata, Minerva, Ceres, and Isis, who, according to Christine, introduced the letters of the alphabet, arms and agriculture to Roman civilization.<sup>59</sup>

Even the title, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, shows the shift in agenda between Christine and Boccaccio. Like the work itself, Boccaccio's title is pejorative of women even while giving the impression of being positive. *Clariss* connotes not only 'fame' but also 'infamy,' and the females in his title are 'women,' rather than ladies. In fact, more *infamous* women populate Boccaccio's book than do the number of positive role models. He stresses the morally unsound actions of such women, and reminds his reader not to follow their example. When he does show worthy women, he portrays them as unique exemptions to the rule that women are immoral.<sup>60</sup> Christine changes the criteria by which "famous" women are mentioned.<sup>61</sup> She emphasizes only the positive deeds of women, rather than those who are notable merely for their incidental fame.<sup>62</sup> For example, while Boccaccio condemns Ceres as an example of "women's inventiveness," the activity of which leads to "social degradation,"<sup>63</sup>

Christine also thought that the presence of civilization itself had an ameliorating influence over people. Christine emphasizes Semiranis's courage and excuses her act of incest (marrying her son) "by the fact that, at that time, there was no written law people

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<sup>59</sup> Brown-Grant (1994) 159.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, three-fourths of the stories in the *Cité des Dames* are from the *De Claris Mulieribus*. Patricia A. Phillippy, "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*," *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, ed. (New York: WW Norton, 1997) 332.

<sup>62</sup> McLeod (1991) 128.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 127.



observed, only the law of nature whereby they were free to do as they pleased without fear of sin" (I.15, 37). It was only with "civilization" which brought written law with it, that such a "terrible transgression" would become a sin. Indeed, "there's no doubt that since [Semiranis] was so proud and honorable, if she *had* thought she was doing anything wrong or that she might be subject to criticism for her actions, she would have refrained from doing as she did" (I.15, 37).

In the *Cité des dames*, Christine argued that women are universally and naturally virtuous. Later in that same year, the *Livre des trois vertus* allowed Christine to show the practical applications of womanly virtue so that her readers might best deserve to be *citoyennes* of the city of ladies.<sup>64</sup> Christine stressed virtuous action because actions are the manner by which one can judge a person's moral character. Indeed, good actions "give evidence of good thought and personal virtue; the opposite is likewise true" (III.V, I.13, 101). Not only did Christine convey a message of wise government, but by discussing women from all social classes (from queens to prostitutes), she demonstrated the inherent virtue of all women.

Christine emphasizes the importance of a woman's good reputation as a way that women can improve themselves. Church-attendance, virtue, and good householding are for the sake of the woman rather than for that of her husband. Karen Pratt sees this as reclaiming the woman's role: "Indeed, her positive presentation of wifely [ingenuity] and

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<sup>64</sup> Christine de Pizan, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, Charity Canon Willard, trans. (New York: Bard Hall P / Persea Books, 1989).



other supposedly feminine characteristics appropriates and rehabilitates prejudicial masculine representations of femininity."<sup>65</sup>

While Christine acknowledges that there may be problems with practicing virtue, she insists that women should always do so. She does not make an exception for inconvenience: "Thus we advise them to follow the path of virtue no matter who may choose the contrary and whether it profits them good or ill" (III.V, I.13, 99). A woman also must be virtuous when it will cause her pain. For example, she is bound to love and honor her husband, no matter the offenses that he commits against her, because:

she loves honor and good repute. No greater honor can be paid a prudent lady than to say of her that she is true and loyal to her lord, that certainly she appears to love him, and that consequently she is faithful to him (III.V, I.13, 101).

Christine upholds her doctrine of virtuous living for all women, whether or not they are able to participate in all of its facets.

She excuses women servants and chambermaids from the full religious observances that she expects of ladies, because they "may have been prevented from learning much about salvation and from serving God by hearing Masses and sermons and by saying Pater Nosters and other prayers. [...] Therefore, it is a good idea to consider actions, deeds, and attitudes useful for these women's salvation" (III.V, III.9, 211). Although these women are unable to participate fully in the religious dimensions of leading a virtuous life, they are nevertheless responsible for leading a moral life. Julia Walker notes the artificiality of directing a courtesy guide at the lower classes, who

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<sup>65</sup> Karen Pratt, "The Context of Christine's *Livre des trois vertus*: Exploiting and Rewriting Tradition," in *Contexts and continuities: proceedings of the IVth International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan*, (Glasgow 21-27 July 2000), Angus J. Kennedy, ed. (Glasgow : University of Glasgow Press, 2002) 673.



would have had neither time nor ability to read it.<sup>66</sup> Thus perhaps instead of treating those passages as actually directed at the lower orders, it would be more accurate to view them as a further tool for Christine to use in imparting her message to noblewomen, who will see that even the lower classes are virtuous.

In the *querelle*, Christine refuted the misogynistic model of women, and in the *Cité des Dames*, she presented an alternate version of womanhood to take its place—one in which they are naturally virtuous. In the *Trois Vertus*, Christine applies this new ideal of womanhood to her contemporaries, particularly to queens and noblewomen. With this application of virtue to noblewomen, Christine gives them a clear role in the political sphere as well.

Christine asserts that women are complementary to men in society. While they are certainly *capable* of performing the same roles as men, they do not because women and men have different talents that make them better suited to their specific roles. *Raison*'s response to the narrator's question, "why women are neither to present a case at a trial, nor bear witness, nor pass sentence" is not as Christine suggests, "that it's all because of some woman or another who behaved badly in a court of law" (I.11, 29).<sup>67</sup> Instead *Raison* promotes sex-complementarity, that men and women have characteristics that complement each other, while also giving examples of women who "excelled in

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<sup>66</sup> Julia Walker, "Repolicizing the *Three Virtues*," in *Au Champ des écritures: IIIe Colloque international sur Christine de Pizan*, Eric Hicks, ed. (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2000) 538.

<sup>67</sup> Here, Christine cites the *Justinian's Digest* (D.3.1.1.5), the law code used in much of France and Italy during the high and late Middle Ages. Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 61. For more on Christine's use of legal style and vocabulary in the *Cité des dames*, see Maureen Cheney Curnow, "'La Pioche d'Inquisition': Legal-Judicial Content and Style in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*," *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, Earl Jeffrey Richards, ed. (Athens, GA: UGA P, 1992) 157-172.





many disciplines which are much more difficult than simply learning the laws and the statutes of men" (I.11, 30).<sup>68</sup>

Raison uses a domestic analogy to further explain this system of sex-complementarity:

just as a wise and prudent lord organizes his household into different domains and operates a strict division of labor amongst his workforce, so God created man and woman to serve Him in different ways and to help and comfort one another, according to a similar division of labor (I.11, 29).

This division of labor means that men's work is such work as politics and law. In fact, men, due to their physical strength, are suited to the law, while women, who "God has often endowed [...] with great intelligence" (I.11, 29), are in charge of domestic affairs because to do so would be to "abandon their customary modesty and to go about bringing cases before a court, as there are already enough men to do so" (I.11, 29).

Christine sees a difference between the *nature de femme* and the *conditions de femme*, or the nature of woman and the experience of being a woman. According to Earl Jeffrey Richards, "the *nature de femme* is the same as the *nature d'homme*; it is women's [experience] and [...] their historical conditions" which make women different from men. Women are not inherently intellectually inferior to men; rather, they are not as well educated and thus possess less knowledge. Women's natural inclination to act morally compels their behavior. They have a moral duty to act as a moral guide for men.

Christine molds the worldly community of women in the *Trois Vertus*, as well as her imaginary city in the *Cité des Dames*, after the well-known medieval political theory of the body politic. John of Salisbury developed this theory in *Policraticus* (1159). The

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<sup>68</sup> Earl Jeffrey Richards, "Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered Writing: the Case of Christine de Pizan," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*. Jane Chance, ed. (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1996) 102.



theory of the body politic posited that each kingdom was an autonomous unit whose members could be compared to a physical body. The king was at the head of this allegorical body and the peasants were at the feet. Because theorists assumed that only men were politically active, this conception of the body politic had little to do with women.<sup>69</sup>

Christine's female body politic places an emphasis on virtue rather than on temporal power, a realm typically left to men. This body politic runs parallel to the one of political power, which was dominated by men. Rather than one body politic superceding the other, they complement each other.

The queen is the head of the female body politic, as the king is to the male body politic. In the epilogue of the *Cité des dames*, Christine addresses all women and exhorts them to "follow the example of your queen, the noble Virgin" (III.19, 237). When Justice leads Mary into the city, she says that:

I shall bring you a most noble queen, she who is blessed amongst all women, to dwell here with her fine company. She will govern and rule over the city and will fill it with the great host of ladies who belong to her court and household (III.I, 201).

This structure of queen ruling over court and household as well as over her subjects was remarkably similar to the structure of the French court, with which Christine would have been the most familiar.

Christine in fact tried to strongly differentiate between her body politic and the male body politic by emphasizing the cross-class nature of women's virtue. The standard for women's behavior holds for every social class. She asserts that all women should exercise virtue to the same extent as queens, even if they do not have the same measure

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<sup>69</sup> Forhan (2002) 36-7.



of rights or responsibilities. Lower class women “can profit from our advice in the earlier chapters to princesses and women living at court. All women can learn to cultivate virtue and avoid vice.” (III.V, II.9, 168). Christine even “speaks to the instruction of women with light morals” (III.V, III.10, 214), which shows the universality of Christine’s message. Indeed, according to Forhan,

The metaphor of the body politic serves an analogous function of enjoining her readers both to respect the value of all human persons and to provide for the security of unequals, while simultaneously acknowledging socially expected and required differences of rank, of class and of gender. While not pretending to equality, the metaphor validates the dignity and worth of the individual person.<sup>70</sup>

The ideas of *nobility* (i.e., rank) and *class* are thus a feature of the masculine body politic.

In Christine’s biography of Charles V, she highlighted the distinction between the crown as a royal office, and the king as an impermanent officeholder. The good king should engender in his subjects the “proper combination of respect, honor, admiration, love, and even fear.”<sup>71</sup> Christine asserts that through public display, Charles sought to “provide the example for his future successors that by solemn order must maintain and conduct itself the very worthy rank of the lofty crown of France,”<sup>72</sup> or that Charles purposefully presented himself in a manner that glorified the kingship of France, and hoped that his successors would maintain the integrity of the crown by doing the same.

Christine’s redefinition of chivalry seems to be synonymous with the qualities that she thinks a good king should possess. Christine described Charles as being

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>72</sup> “donner exemple à ses successeurs à venir que par solemnel ordre se doit tenir et mener le tres digne degré de la haute couronne de France.” *Livre des Fais*, qtd. Daisy Delogu, “Reinventing the Ideal Sovereign in Christine de Pizan’s *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*,” 31 *Medievalia et Humanistica* (2004) 44.



chivalrous, but as he was a sickly and scholarly man, the vision of the virile warlord was clearly not what she had in mind. Instead, the king was chivalrous because he had the “ability not only to raise and pay great armies and to (re) conquer lands, but also to construct public works, maintain an impressive household, and avoid burdening his people with taxes.”<sup>73</sup> She refers to Charlemagne, known for both his intellectual pursuits as well as his skill as a war leader, as an illustration of this new ideal of chivalrous kingship.

The queen, as wife of the king, could expect her “domestic sphere” to include the kingdom of France. Because a noblewoman’s domestic sphere would have bled into that of the political, the noblewoman’s role as mediator can be seen as part of her domestic duties. For the princess to whom Christine dedicated the *Trois Vertus*, Marguerite, duchess de Guyenne, acting modestly and supporting her husband would “become even more vital when the husband is a prince engaged in difficult political negotiation.”<sup>74</sup> Christine notes that “queens and princesses have greatly benefited this world by bringing about peace between enemies, between princes and their barons, or between rebellious subjects and their lords” (III.V, 1.9, 86).

Thus, “because of their natural qualities of prudence and circumspection,”<sup>75</sup> noblewomen are ideally suited to having the have a political role of peacemaker as part of their domestic duties. In both the *Cité des dames* and the *Trois vertus*, Christine shows women playing peacemaker. In the *Trois vertus*, Christine asserts that

women particularly should concern themselves with peace because men by nature are more foolhardy and headstrong, and their overwhelming desire to avenge themselves

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<sup>73</sup> Delogu (2004) 49.

<sup>74</sup> Pratt (2002) 677.

<sup>75</sup> Forhan (2002) 62.





prevents them from foreseeing the resulting dangers and terrors of war. But woman by nature is more gentle and circumspect. Therefore, if she has sufficient will and wisdom she can provide the best possible means to pacify the man (III.V, I.9, 86).

Therefore, to Christine, women are more adept at creating peace than are men. Just as the king's role as ruler is essential to the body politic, so too is the queen's position as mediator. Christine's vision of sex-complementarity means that men and women should not perform each other's tasks or take on the other's role.

Christine discusses in even more depth the role of the noblewoman as peacekeeper in the *Trois Vertus*. She has two factors to consider in deciding her actions when her husband is going to war:

she will balance the great ills, infinite cruelties, losses, deaths, and destruction to property against the war's outcome, which is usually unpredictable. She will seriously consider whether she can preserve the honor of her lord and yet prevent the war (III.V, I.9, 85).

Having carefully thought out her options and the potential outcomes of war, "working wisely and calling on God's aid, she will strive to maintain peace" (III.V, I.9, 85). Christine names the situations in which this is particularly necessary:

if any prince of the realm or the country, or any baron, knight, or powerful subject should hold a grudge against her lord, or if he is involved in any such quarrel and she foresees that for her lord to take a prisoner or make a battle would lead to trouble in the land (III.V, I.9, 85).

In such a situation, "the good lady will strive to avoid destruction of her people, making peace and urging her lord (the prince) and his council to consider the potential harm inherent in any martial adventure" (III.V, I.9, 85-6). Christine also expects the lady to act as peacemaker among her husband's relatives: "she will intercede on their behalf with her lord if there is need. If disagreements arise among them, she will make every effort to



pacify them” (III.V, I.14, 101). The queen is able to perform the role as mediator because it is not her honor and political position at stake, but rather her husband’s. Therefore, she can beg and make concessions where her husband, the king, cannot.

Christine refers to a former queen of France, Blanche de Castille (1188-1252), as such a peacemaker in both the *Trois vertus* and the *Cité des dames*.<sup>76</sup> In the *Trois vertus*, Blanche serves to reinforce the image of queen as peacemaker. “Good Queen Blanche, mother of Saint Louis, always strove to reconcile the king with his barons, and, among others, the Count of Champagne” (III.V, I. 9, 86). In the *Cité des dames*, Christine made the interesting decision of showing Blanche as becoming the object of courtly love as a way of pacifying the count of Champagne:

The most noble Blanche, Queen of France and mother of Saint Louis, was loved by the count of Champagne for her great wisdom, prudence, purity and kindness. This good lady reproached the count for having risen up against the king, Saint Louis, admonishing him for how he had acted in return for all the good things that her son had done for him. On hearing her wise words, he gazed with rapt attention at Queen Blanche and was captivated by her great virtue and respectability, despite the fact that she had long since passed the flower of her youth. The count was so suddenly overcome with love for her that he didn’t know what to do. He would rather have died than declare his feelings for her, for he knew that she was far too honorable to answer his pleas. From that day forth, he would suffer terribly because of this fervent passion that had taken hold of him. None the less, the count managed to reply to her reproaches, stating that she should have no fear that he would ever wage war on the king, for he would always be a loyal subject to him. Moreover, she could be sure that not just his mind and body, but everything he owned, were entirely at her disposal. From that moment on, he adored her for the rest of

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<sup>76</sup> A brief biography of Blanche will be discussed below in Chapter II.



his life, even though he had little hope of ever seeing his passion requited (*Cité des dames*, II.65, 191).

Christine portrays Blanche as embodying the virtues that a lady, and particularly a queen, should possess: great wisdom, prudence, purity and kindness. She is also chaste, even though she has incited great passion within the count of Champagne. She therefore represents the perfect courtly lady. This reading of Blanche's life is interesting because it underscores the queen's ability to use informal political power to make political alliances and forward a political agenda.

Christine's strong belief in women's virtue shaped her theory of the gendered body politic. Noblewomen, who have particular political roles in this gendered vision of society, are responsible for maintaining peace in court. Christine expected much from queens, who she thought should both act as peacemakers as well as take an active, if informal, role in the government.



## Chapter II: The Queen's Power in the High and Late Middle Ages

Christine's theory of the gendered body politic seems to reflect lessons learned from the reign of Isabeau de Bavière. Unlike many of her predecessors, whose political power was informal, Isabeau had a great deal of formal political power placed upon her. As the king's representative in a politically volatile court, Isabeau was expected to act as both regent and ruler. Because her loyalties were bound to the protection and support of the immediate royal family, she was unable to mediate effectively between rival political factions. Beginning in the eleventh century, the queen's role in the French court became increasingly informal. Queens were often expected to act as peacekeepers, but were rarely officially empowered to do so. The only time that they had such official power was when acting as regent for a minor or absent king. Even then, it was understood that their decisions were subject to the approval of the king when he claimed sole authority. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the *potestas* that a queen had at her disposal decreased, which in turn, increased the necessity of using *auctoritas* in order to assist her husband as ruler. By using *auctoritas*, French queens were traditionally able to have influence without *potestas*.

Because of political exigencies, Isabeau broke from the model of queenship set by her predecessors. Isabeau was twenty-three years old at the onset of Charles VI's lifelong insanity in 1392. The members of the royal court spent much of the last decade of the fourteenth century compensating for the alternating presence and absence of the king. They fought each other for both legitimacy to rule France as the king's substitute as well as for the ability to become regent in the case of the king's death if the *dauphin*





was still in his minority. Louis d'Orléans was the brother of the king, and was thus the most obvious replacement. The dukes of Bourgogne, Bourbon (d. 1410) and Berry (d. 1416), the king's uncles, were experienced rulers. Isabeau, meanwhile, had the duty to protect the interests of the king and the royal children.<sup>77</sup> Isabeau's greater official political power was enabled by the political turmoil. However, because she did not possess the *auctoritas* needed to exert her *potestas*, she was neither able to rule France effectively nor to effect peace.

Early medieval queens were an integral part of ruling the kingdom because rule was family-based and highly reliant on the person of the king, as might be found with a lesser lord. As an official administration developed to take over the ruling of the country, official *potestas* began to be held exclusively by the king. However, queens were still able to contribute to ruling.<sup>78</sup>

The official role of the French queen in the administration of the country began to decline with Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), the wife of King Louis VII (r. 1137-1180). While she was Queen of France, Eleanor was also the Duchess of Aquitaine, and ruled her lands in her own right. The king did not exercise power in her domain, nor did she in his. Concurrent with Eleanor's exercise of feudal power in Aquitaine, the chancery of the king grew, and the workings of the court became more formalized. Indeed, according to Margaret Labarge, "by the thirteenth century [...] it was the

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<sup>77</sup> Gibbons (1996b) 26.

<sup>78</sup> For an excellent examination of women's role at Charlemagne's court, see Janet L. Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of the Monstrous Regiment of Women?" in *Medieval Queenships*, John Carmi Parsons, ed. (New York: St. Martin's P, 1993) 43-62.



personal influence of the particular queen which tended to define her actual power.”<sup>79</sup> While actual power may have varied according to the queen’s personal influence, or *auctoritas*, the political power, or *potestas*, employed in the administration of the kingdom fell squarely within the purview of the king.

The queen of France derived her power solely from her status as wife of the king, as conferred upon her symbolically through her coronation. According to Colette Beaune, “as the queens were not of French royal blood, the coronation was more important to them than it was to the kings, unless their having given birth to a successor to the throne had already compensated for that lack.”<sup>80</sup> Thus before the fourteenth century the queen, as the future conduit of the royal children, became royal herself, through the coronation ceremony, which bestowed upon her the power and the right to act as a regent if needed.<sup>81</sup> Diane Bornstein notes that “a more elaborate coronation ceremony, an increasingly autonomous and extensive household, and a personal seal all added to the prestige of the queen.”<sup>82</sup>

While a queen’s assumption of leadership typically occurred in courtly life, she was, nonetheless, able to adopt the *potestas* of the king as regent. As the wife of the king, her status within the court was second only to that of the king, giving her the ability to influence culture and courtly life, and to act as a moral guide for the king, the country, and particularly for her children, the next generation of kings and courtiers. She had the

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<sup>79</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston: Beacon P, 1986) 48.

<sup>80</sup> Beaune (1991) 63.

<sup>81</sup> Claire Richter Sherman, “The Queen in Ch.V’s “Coronation Book”: Jeanne de Bourbon and the “*Ordo ad Reginam Benedictam*,” 8 *Viator* (1977) 269.

<sup>82</sup> Diane Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (New York: Archeron Books, 1983) 78.



potential to rule as regent if her husband died while her son was in his minority, or if the king was otherwise unable to rule.

Such was the case with Blanche de Castille (1188-1252), whose husband, Louis VIII (r. 1223-26), died when her son, Saint Louis IX (r. 1226-70), was twelve years old. Blanche acted as his regent throughout his minority (1226-1242), and again when he left France for the Crusades (1248-52). In the six intervening years, she also exercised administrative functions, as he chose to lead a contemplative life incompatible with ruling.<sup>83</sup> Blanche seems to exemplify Claire Richter Sherman's statement that "although the political authority of the queen almost disappeared after 1200, she nevertheless continued to play an important role in the official and ceremonial life of the reign and 'to function both as an agent and as a symbol of royalty.'"<sup>84</sup>

Jeanne de Bourbon (1337-78) played a strong, if unofficial role in the reign of her husband, Charles V, as Claire Richter Sherman's "The Queen in Charles V's 'Coronation Book': Jeanne de Bourbon and the "*Ordo ad Reginam Benedicendam*," shows. Even though it was Charles and not Jeanne who commissioned the *ordo*, Jeanne's *auctoritas* can still be discerned. In 1365, Charles V commissioned the *Coronation Book of Charles V of France*,<sup>85</sup> an illustration of the coronation ceremony and the prayers invoked during its course. The majority of miniatures, added after manuscript's completion, were supervised directly by Charles V.

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<sup>83</sup> Labarge 54. Indeed, when Louis IX wrote a mirror for his daughters, he emphasized moral rather than practical concerns. Bornstein.

<sup>84</sup> Sherman (1977) 268.

<sup>85</sup> The book has no formal title and is instead inscribed with the following description: "Ce livre du sacre des rois de France est a nous Charles le V, de notre nom roy de France, et le fimes coriger ordener escrire et istorier l'an MCCCLXV. Charles."



The queen's *ordo*, the depiction of her coronation, contains nine miniatures of the queen, twenty-five percent of the total number of miniatures in the *Coronation Book*. Jeanne de Bourbon's *ordo* had more prayers for the queen than did the tenth century *ordos*,<sup>86</sup> which reflects the increasing importance of the queen's *auctoritas* as conferred in the coronation ceremony on her status. The coronation ceremony emphasized the Queen's moral duties to the people; for example, the queen's rod is associated with "virtue and justice, bidding the queen to be merciful and generous to the poor and to widows and orphans."<sup>87</sup> Additionally, prayers that emphasized her function as the bearer of the royal children were meant to "assure the fertility of the queen in a supernatural, almost magical fashion."<sup>88</sup>

The symbols of the queen's coronation show her as inferior, yet similar, to the king. She was only anointed on the head and the chest, rather than on the seven places that her husband was. Her throne was smaller and lower than was the king's. Queens routinely sat at the king's left hand, a less-respected position. In addition, her scepter was smaller and different, and she did not wear the fleur-de-lis mantle that her husband did. Only the barons and her ladies participated in her ceremony, as opposed to the lords of the realm and prelates involved in the king's ceremony. Rather than being the kingdom's spiritual head, as was the king, the queen was the head of the courtiers and her ladies.<sup>89</sup>

Jeanne de Bourbon's largely symbolic official position allowed her to exercise *auctoritas* during the reign of her husband. Charles and Jeanne, who were raised together, apparently loved each other and had a very happy marriage. His high regard for

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 257. Twenty-five years later, as the queen immediately succeeding Jeanne, Isabeau de Bavière's coronation ceremony followed the same *ordo*.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 279.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 269.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 270.





the queen can be seen in the number of official portraits of her, as well as in “her very prominent role in the official social and ceremonial life of the reign.”<sup>90</sup> In addition, Charles V made her the “chief guardian and keeper of the royal children, assisted by her two co-guardians and a council whose members were designated in advance” in the event that her husband should die while their children, the future Charles VI and Louis d’Orléans, were in their minority.<sup>91</sup> By promoting and maintaining his wife’s queenly style, Charles demonstrated his respect and love for her.<sup>92</sup> Sherman observes that “Charles V’s generosity in maintaining the queen and her household in proper splendor is shown in his many payments to merchants and artisans for clothes, jewels and other valuable objects.”<sup>93</sup>

Charles V and Jeanne de Bourbon both died early, Jeanne in 1378 and Charles in 1380. Charles VI had a regency council until he was fourteen, and then ruled with the aid of the royal council thereafter. He married Isabeau de Bavière in 1385, and appears to have been an active ruler until 1392, when he began to show symptoms of schizophrenia.<sup>94</sup> His episodes lasted months at a time, and effectively incapacitated him as a ruler. This behavior was problematic for the royal court. The court structure was based on the presence of a strong ruler, which made the balance of power in Charles VI’s court difficult to maintain. While Charles made Isabeau the strongest official political figure in court until her son’s majority, Isabeau was unable to rule effectively because she could not simultaneously keep the peace.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 288-90.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 289. This provision proved unnecessary. Jeanne died in childbirth two years before Charles’s own early death.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 290.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 289.

<sup>94</sup> Famiglietti, based on symptoms described by various chroniclers, particularly the Monk of Saint-Denis and Monsrelet, has identified his symptoms as those of a schizophrenic and has explained his behavior, both during and between episodes, using that diagnosis. Famiglietti (1986) 7-9.



By 1401, the royal dukes' infighting had become excessive. Their dispute concerned the marriage of the *dauphin*, Louis, duke de Guyenne.<sup>95</sup> Louis d'Orléans wanted him to marry his daughter, while Philippe de Bourgogne desired an alliance with his branch of the family, the latter of which Isabeau supported.<sup>96</sup> Isabeau wished to marry her son to the Philippe's granddaughter, Marguerite de Bourgogne, for personal reasons: her cousin, Rupert, Holy Roman Emperor, supported that alliance, and Philippe de Bourgogne was her mentor, and had arranged her marriage sixteen years before.<sup>97</sup>

Even though no official decision had been made, this display of preference caused tension between the dukes of Orléans and Bourgogne, which the queen was forced to solve. In January 1402, she and three other arbiters mediated this conflict. They decided that if either of the parties felt threatened by the other, then he should report it to the queen.<sup>98</sup> According to Famiglietti, "this work as arbiter brought to public notice Isabeau's aptitude for politics and was the stepping stone to the new role she would soon play in the government."<sup>99</sup> In addition, the king gave Isabeau the power "to deal with governmental business of any type with the aid of the dukes and whichever councilors she wished" in the absence of the king.<sup>100</sup>

On 1 July 1402, Charles VI made Isabeau's power to mediate between the royal dukes official. This *potestas* made Isabeau the sole representative in court politics of the interests of the immediate royal family.<sup>101</sup> The *ordenance* gave Isabeau the "power,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>97</sup> Gibbons (1996b) 27.

<sup>98</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 24; Gibbons (1996b) 27.

<sup>99</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 25.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 27.



authority and special mandate to settle all of the debates, discourses, dissensions, and divisions” between the king’s brother and his uncles.<sup>102</sup> This expansion of Isabeau’s power was significant. It conferred upon her a measure of the king’s power. The king specifically transferred to her the right to use his *potestas*, or formal power, his *auctoritas*, or informal power, and “special mandate,” or a tool with which to exercise these powers. Thus due to Charles’s illness, the position of the queen temporarily gained the amount of power that the queenship had not had since the early Middle Ages.<sup>103</sup>

In 1403, Charles withdrew much of the power that he had given Isabeau out of fear that she was partisan to her brother, the duke of Bavaria.<sup>104</sup> After much negotiating, Charles reinstated and increased his wife’s responsibilities. The queen became the sole head of the royal council in the absence of the king, and the queen had the “*garde, nourrissement et gouvernement*” of the royal children in the event of the king’s early demise. In this case, the prince would be crowned king no matter his age.<sup>105</sup>

The power dynamics of the court changed dramatically in 1404 with the death of Philippe de Bourgogne, when Jean de Bourgogne, his son, became the duke.<sup>106</sup> Even though she aligned their nuclear families by marrying her son, Louis de Guyenne, to Marguerite de Bourgogne,<sup>107</sup> Isabeau neither trusted nor liked Jean de Bourgogne. Isabeau thought that he seemed power-hungry and dangerous. In early 1405, Isabeau

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<sup>102</sup> “pouvoir, auctorité et mandement espécial de pouveoir à l’apaisement de tous les débas, descors, dissensions et divisions qui se mouveoriet ou pourroient mouvoir de lors en avant en quelque manière et pour quelque cause que ce feust, estre noz très chers et très amez oncles et frère et quelxconques autres de noz sang et lignage[...].” Translation mine. Reprinted in *Quelques pièces relatives à la vie de Louis I, duc d’Orléans et de Valentine Visconti, sa femme*. Frances M. Graves, ed. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1913. 190

<sup>103</sup> Only when the ordained ruler is unable to govern would the second in command rule temporarily. Isabeau’s situation is unusual because her eldest son was so young – had the heir been of age, he would have assumed command, as Charles V (as *dauphin*) had in 1358 when Jean II was held captive by the English.

<sup>104</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 28.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>106</sup> Gibbons (1996b) 28.

<sup>107</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 31.



wrote Jean de Bourgogne a letter reminding him of his place in the hierarchy of the court.<sup>108</sup> In it, she said that she would give him precedence over all others except for those who had a closer claim to the king than did he, which included much of the court.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, the royal dukes pursued their own agendas. Louis d'Orléans extorted approximately 400,000 francs from the government.<sup>110</sup> In response, Jean de Bourgogne pressed for the need to reform the government, perhaps as a ploy to wrest power from Louis d'Orléans.<sup>111</sup> While Bourgogne enjoyed huge popularity amongst the people, Orléans was unpopular due to the taxes for which he pressed in order to fund the gifts that he had pressured the king to give him.<sup>112</sup>

The weaknesses in Isabeau's reign were clearly exposed by a political manoeuvre that occurred in the fall of 1405. With the turmoil produced by these events, the queen became an autonomous political operative. Her actions and political decisions in support of the monarchy became pronounced, and it is clear that even in 1405 that the two different positions she held as queen, ruler and mediator, were mutually exclusive. She could not effectively represent the government while still negotiating between the power-hungry dukes.

In August 1405, the king summoned the royal council to Paris in response to Jean de Bourgogne's call for reform. The duke de Bourgogne arrived with 2,700 troops

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 41; Gibbons (1996b) 28-9.

<sup>110</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 43. In the same fiscal year, 1404-1405, the queen spent 80,000 francs on her court.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 46.





behind him in September.<sup>113</sup> The queen and Louis d'Orléans feared that Bourgogne would use his son-in-law, Louis de Guyenne, for political leverage, and maybe even take him hostage. Even though the royal children were detained by an illness of Louis de Guyenne, Isabeau and Orléans fled to Melun, with orders for other royal children to follow.<sup>114</sup> Bourgogne intercepted the children and their entourage on the way to Melun, and took them back to Paris. This move was in fact illegal, even though the duke was the father of one of the children and the father-in-law of the other. Only the queen had the official legal authority to change the residence of the *dauphin*. Once in Paris, Bourgogne spun the story to make himself look the hero.<sup>115</sup> Orléans arrived in Paris, with orders from the queen to return the royal children to her in Melun. The queen and Bourgogne proceeded to carry out a battle of wills: the queen stayed in Melun, waiting for her children and Bourgogne stayed in Paris, keeping them there with him.<sup>116</sup>

The king ordered the council to convene in Vincennes, which it did on 12 October 1405.<sup>117</sup> The kings of Sicily<sup>118</sup> and Navarre, as well as the dukes of Bourbon and Berry, aided the queen in brokering a peace treaty between Jean de Bourgogne and Louis d'Orléans. This peace proscribed hostilities between the dukes, who could neither raise an army nor speak poorly against the other.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the official prohibition of overt hostilities, tension between the dukes rose. At the same time, Charles VI began reforming the government. He cut the list of

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<sup>113</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 46; Gibbons (1996b) 29.

<sup>114</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 46; Gibbons (1996b) 29.

<sup>115</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 46; Gibbons (1996b) 29. Bourgogne was so successful at it that this incident is usually referred to as the kidnapping of the royal children *by Isabeau*.

<sup>116</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 46; Gibbons (1996b) 29.

<sup>117</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 51.

<sup>118</sup> The duke d'Anjou, the king's cousin, also held the title King of Sicily.

<sup>119</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 52.



official councilors from fifty-one men to twenty-six.<sup>120</sup> The council was still under the influence of Louis d'Orléans, which made Jean de Bourgogne's ability to keep his peace treaties difficult.<sup>121</sup> On November 30, 1406, Jean de Bourgogne signed two treaties with England that would ultimately conflict. In one treaty, he represented the king of France when swearing to a one-year reprieve from Anglo-French hostilities. In the other, as a part of trade interests for Flanders, a territory that his mother had bequeathed to him, he promised not to attack the English, which would represent a considerable problem as he was the vassal of the king of France.<sup>122</sup>

Due to the conflicting pacts, in Liège Jean de Bourgogne would have to fight the king of France, who was represented by Louis d'Orléans. In addition, naval battles led by a client of Orléans, Clignet de Brébant, caused disturbances in trade between Flanders and England.<sup>123</sup> According to Famiglietti, "it must have appeared to Duke John that everywhere he turned, his way was blocked by Louis of Orléans."<sup>124</sup> Thus on November 23, 1407, Jean de Bourgogne orchestrated the assassination of Louis d'Orléans, a crime to which he then confessed.<sup>125</sup>

Much of the following three years was spent resolving the fallout of the assassination. Charles (1394-1465), the thirteen-year-old duke d'Orléans, and his mother, Valentina Visconti (d. 1408), pressed for the prosecution of Louis d'Orléans's

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<sup>120</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 60.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 63.



murderer.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, Jean de Bourgogne presented the murder as an action behind which he stood, even while he asked for the king's pardon from displeasure.<sup>127</sup>

One result of the murder was a change in the laws of succession, as well as in the manner by which the king could legally alter them. On 26 December 1407, the king ordained that a new royal council would govern in case of his death. The members of this council were listed by name rather than by title. Jean de Bourgogne, out of the grace and favor of the king, was not mentioned. In addition, the king set fourteen years as the age of royal majority. The most important feature of this change was the manner in which the king effected it. He signed this ordinance in front of the Parlement de Paris, and from then on, a change in succession could only be done in a similar manner.<sup>128</sup>

In January 1409, the king issued an ordinance concerning governance during his "absences." In the absence of the queen, the twelve-year-old duke de Guyenne was given the ability to issue the decision of the council in the king's name, which seems to show that the queen still had some power over the royal council. Even though she was failing at the broader negotiations between the royal dukes, she maintained the *potestas* needed to run the kingdom.<sup>129</sup>

The matter of Louis d'Orléans's murder finally seemed to be resolved in March 1409. The king pardoned Jean de Bourgogne, more out of a desire for peace rather than out of the belief of Jean's innocence. Charles VI required the sons of Louis d'Orléans,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>127</sup> Famiglietti (1986) 66.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 74.



Charles and Philippe, to forgive their second cousin and father's murderer as well, which the boys professed to do.<sup>130</sup>

The tensions between the dukes that eventually led to Louis d'Orléans's murder demonstrate the way that Isabeau's two mutually exclusive official roles prevented her from effectively brokering a peace between the dukes. As the king's representative, charged with his power, her duty was to maintain the integrity of the French royal crown and to ensure that Charles VI or his son was king. This was not a position on which Isabeau was able or willing to negotiate. However, her official role was also as mediator. There was only so much negotiating that she was able to do since she herself was approaching the table with non-negotiable positions.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 75.





## Chapter III: The Application of Political Theory to Politics

Christine de Pizan's political theory, in which the queen has a different yet equally vital role as the head of the body politic as the king, seems to reflect the both successful and unsuccessful reigns of recent French monarchs. Through the idiom of the gendered body politic, Christine applied the lessons learned in the recent past to the current political situation. While in Christine's biography of Charles V, she outlined the qualities that make a good king, and in the *epistre a la royne* (1405), she applied the qualities that, under the gendered body politic, make a good queen, in order to advise Isabeau de Bavière. In the *epistre*, Christine criticized the queen's dual roles as both ruler and mediator, who, she argues, could more effectively establish peace by following the traditional queenly role of mediator.

Christine's biography of Charles V describes the characteristics that she thinks a good king should embody. The biography is part of the mirror for princes genre, and thus Christine's portrayal of Charles V is meant to instruct. According to Forhan, "the purpose of all mirrors for princes [...] is the transformation of the immature or irresponsible prince into the model king."<sup>131</sup> The conventions of this genre include "administer[ing] justice by 'treating equals equally', [being] generous to friends, [being] firm but just to enemies, and [being] a courteous and personal leader in battle."<sup>132</sup>

To Christine, the wise king makes decisions that are good for the kingdom and for the people in it. Christine emphasized Charles V's wisdom in the title of his biography: *Les Fais et bonnes meurs du Sage Roy Charles V*. She was the first to use the sobriquet

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<sup>131</sup> Forhan (2002) 34.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 34-5.



for Charles, “le Sage.”<sup>133</sup> Derived from Aquinas’s glossed version of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, her definition of *sagesse* is “*sapience, science, entendement, prudence and art*.”<sup>134</sup> *Sapience* denotes “a knowledge of first causes and principles based on a study of theology and on metaphysics as well.”<sup>135</sup> Charles amply demonstrated this wisdom. For example, he ordered the translations of such works as Augustine’s *City of God*, John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, and Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Ethics*. He also had as advisors such intellectuals as Nicole Oresme and Christine’s father, Tommaso di Pizzano, an Italian-educated astronomer.<sup>136</sup>

Christine showed that the king solicited the advice of these wise counselors before making political decisions. While Christine accepted that the king had the right to be an absolute monarch, she characterized Charles’s exercise of mediated monarchy as a demonstration of his wisdom. Delogu identifies this vision of mediated monarchy as having been applied in Charles’s treatment of the Schism. He discussed the problem with a wise few, such as legal scholars, clerics and politicians.<sup>137</sup> In addition, when looking to go to war, not only did Charles ask the advice of learned scholars, but he also sought the advice of the *bourgeoisie*, as the people would have been the most affected by war.<sup>138</sup>

For Christine, it was important that a good king display *prudence*, which has a different connotation than does the modern word. Prudence, in a definition taken from Bernard of Clairvaux in *Five Books on Consideration*, “controls the emotions, guides

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<sup>133</sup> Claire Richter Sherman, “Representations of Charles V of France (1338-1380) as a Wise Ruler.” 2 *Medievalia et Humanistica* (1971) 83; Delogu (2004) 51.

<sup>134</sup> Sherman (1971) 84.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>137</sup> Delogu (2004) 46. Willard notes that it appears that near the end of his life, Charles had changed his mind on which faction to support, and seems to have said as much on his deathbed. However, French policy did not change. Willard (1984) 131.

<sup>138</sup> Delogu (2004) 46. Christine further elaborates on this need in the *Fayes des Armes*. She names the four estates that should be consulted before the declaration of war.



actions, corrects excesses, improves behaviors, confers dignity and order on life, and even imparts knowledge of divine and human affairs.”<sup>139</sup> As an example of the king’s prudence, Christine points to Charles’s creation of a written law that established the line of succession in order to prevent the problems that started the Hundred Years’ War and ended the Capetian line. A second example of his prudence was a canal that he had planned to connect the Seine and Loire Rivers. Even though this project was not accomplished in his lifetime, it shows the application of his wisdom to the public good.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, according to Delogu, “the hallmark of Charles’s prudence, and the secret to his success as a king, is the recognition that in serving his kingdom he is serving his own political ends.”<sup>141</sup>

Thus Christine, in the *Livre des fais*, showed the qualities that she thought make a good king. Her definition of wisdom, the primary quality of the king, seems to have been infinitely expandable, as it included public works and an emphasis on the importance of political advice. The wise king is the counterpart to Christine’s virtuous queen.

As in the *Livre des fais*, in the *epistre a la royne*, one can see Christine’s vision of proper queenship, in which the queen is the virtuous mediator. However, Christine was not simply advising the queen to continue the political policies that she had held due to the king’s appointment as negotiator. Instead, the letter shows that Christine thought that the best model for governing was the gendered body politic: the king makes decisions of government, preferably in the same vein as did the wise Charles V, and the queen acts as mediator between her husband and his subjects. As auxiliary political leader, her

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<sup>139</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, qtd. in George P. Evans, “Cardinal Virtues,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Michael Downey, ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical P, 1993) 115.

<sup>140</sup> Delogu (2004) 51-2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 53.



responsibility is to aid her husband, the actual political leader, by representing the people and by using her status as a liminal figure to negotiate between political forces. Christine, through her example of Blanche de Castille, a former and evidently successful queen of France, seems to have thought that the queen should have had an unofficial role in ruling in order to wield her power as a mediator most effectively.

Christine placed *Isabeau* at its head as queen and royal mediator. Because she is separated from the people in her every day life, it is the responsibility of her advisors to “report [...] the common needs of your subjects” (270). Thus Christine “recall[s] the piteous complaints of your grieving French supplicants, at present oppressed by affliction and sorrow” (270). Christine further emphasizes the queen’s natural place in the body politic by likening her own advice to medicine. Christine’s missive to the queen is similar to the “common occurrence for people suffering from an illness seeking cures and the hungry searching for food and likewise each thing its proper remedy” (269). For Christine, a medical analogy is particularly pertinent because she sees the queen as “the medicine and sovereign remedy to cure this realm, at present sorely and piteously wounded and in peril of worse” (270).

Christine also includes the royal dukes as part of the head of the body politic. She asks the queen to “seek and obtain a ready peace between these two worthy princes, cousins by blood and natural friends, but at present moved by a strange fortune to contention with each other” (270). Christine’s introduction to the *Epistre* (Kennedy 253)<sup>142</sup> shows her perception that *Isabeau* had become partisan, even though *Isabeau* had been provided with and had previously exercised the power to mediate disputes between

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<sup>142</sup> Angus Kennedy, “Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre a la reine*,” 92 *Revue des langues romanes* (1988) 253-264. For *Isabeau*’s formal, informal and practical authority, see Chapter II above.





the royal dukes. The letter was written “to the Queen of France at Melun, where she had been accompanied by my Lord of Orleans,” and was amassing troops against the “dukes of Bourgogne and Limbourg and the Count of Nevers,<sup>143</sup> brothers who were at the time in Paris likewise assembling men-at-arms from all quarters.” Rather than the queen mediating peace between the quarreling nobles, she had become part of their quarrel. It was only though “the aid of the kings of Sicily and Navarre, and with them the dukes of Bourbon and Berry, and the good council of the king, [that] a right and peaceful solution was achieved” (CCW 269). Christine saw this political struggle as Isabeau and Orléans on one side and Bourgogne on the other, with the senior members of the royal council as adjudicators. This was not an occasion, as Tracy Adams suggests, where the queen was, in fact, “already mediating.”<sup>144</sup> Instead, the queen had departed from her previously successful program of neutral mediation.

Christine warns against political partisanship because it is impossible for the queen to both maintain peace and choose sides. She reminds the queen that even “if the dignity of [your] position may be considered to have been injured by one of the

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<sup>143</sup> Philippe, duke of Limbourg and Antoine, Count of Nevers, were Jean de Bourgogne’s brothers.

<sup>144</sup> Tracy Adams, “*Moyenneresse de traicte de paix: Christine de Pizan’s Mediators*,” in *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005) 180. Adams states that the while the letter is meant to instruct the public on how to think about the queen, rather than to influence her. However, it seems that Adams did not look at the historical context closely enough. It is true, as she says, that the “queen had already been mediating for years at that point.” However, her argument, that “Christine’s purpose is to foreground Isabeau’s in-between position, and in so doing, to promote an image of Isabeau as untainted by the narrow political interests of the ducal factions” (Adams 180), seems farfetched. Christine in the letter apologizes for having written it in her own hand rather than that of the scribe (Kennedy (1988) 258). In addition, it came during an apparent interruption of a never-ending process for peace. At the time when the queen was needed most as mediator, she had apparently chosen sides in the ducal bickering. Adams seems to have forgotten that laws of determinism do not bind historical subjects, who had their own human agency. It seems more reasonable that Christine did indeed write her letter under the circumstances that she professes. She saw her queen in retreat in Melun while the tensions between the dukes worsened. Did she know that they were involved in a battle of wills, the outcome of which determined the remainder of Isabeau’s reign? Was she so prescient as to know the importance of Isabeau’s retreat? The letter suggests not. Thus there is no reason not to take the letter at face value and view it as a genuine plea for the queen to make an already bad situation no worse.



contenders, whereby your noble heart might be less inclined to work for this peace” (270-271), the queen should still “sacrifice a part of [her] rights to avoid a greater misfortune or to gain a superior advantage” (271). Bourgogne had injured the dignity of the queen’s position by removing Louis de Guyenne from her control. In removing the *dauphin* from Paris so that he would not come to harm at the hands of the duke de Bourgogne, Isabeau firmly chose sides in the conflict between her husband’s relatives.

Isabeau’s participation in this larger struggle is contrary to Christine’s vision of virtuous queenship. The partisan struggle is “the devil’s work” that could lead to the “realm [being] rapidly [...] destroyed” and to a “perpetual hatred [that] might be born and grow among the heirs and children of the noble blood of France, which has been like the very body and pillar for the defense of this realm, long recognized as strong and powerful for this very reason” (270).<sup>145</sup> Thus Isabeau, who took partisan sides in this fight was not fulfilling her proper role as mediator because she was acting as a partisan ruler.

Christine places the onus of making peace on the queen. She asks rhetorically, “if pity, charity, clemency and benignity are not to be found in a great princess, where then can they be expected?” (271). Princesses who are at the head of the body politic are supposed to embody the virtues of femininity and use these virtues in ruling. Christine expects the queen to actively embody the qualities of motherhood that Mary, Mother of God, represents: “where is the mother so hardhearted, if she didn’t have a veritable heart

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<sup>145</sup> “A long and perpetual hatred” in fact did arise. Charles d’Orléans swore and pursued vengeance against Jean de Bourgogne after he had Louis d’Orléans killed in 1407 (see above), and they fought a civil war over it. It was not until the late 1420s that the kingdom was reunited.



of stone, who could bear to see her children kill each other, spilling each other's blood and destroying and scattering their poor arms and limbs?" (272).<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, "it is to be expected that a noble princess or lady should be the means of bringing about a treaty of peace, as can be seen in the cases of the valiant ladies praised by the Holy Scriptures" (271). Other examples of women who mediate between the people and their male kin are Esther: "who by her good judgment and kindness appeased the wrath of King Ahasuerus so that he withdrew the sentence against the people condemned to death" (271); and Bathsheba, who "on many occasions appeased David's anger" (271). These women kept peace by interceding with their husbands.

Christine includes four examples of virtuous queens in the letter, all of which underscore her message that the prudent princess acts as negotiator. For instance, in the example of "the very great princess in Rome," her

son had been wrongfully and without cause banished and exiled from the city. Afterwards, when he had assembled such a large army to avenge his injury that it could have destroyed everything, didn't she go before her son to appease his wrath and reconcile him with the Romans? (271)

It is the woman ruler's responsibility to intercede with powerful male rulers to avoid unnecessary conflict.

By invoking Mary as a model of queenship, Christine emphasizes the queen's role in creating peace with her use of informal power: "just as the Queen of Heaven is called Mother of God by all of Christendom, any good and wise queen should be called mother and comforter and advocate of her subjects and her people" (272). As Mary in the *Cité des dames*, is shown to be the allegorical head of the female body politic, Isabeau is its

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<sup>146</sup> These duties were in fact part of Isabeau's coronation ceremony, as she used Jeanne de Bourbon's *ordo*, described above.



earthly head. Isabeau should use the power that is rightfully hers as a part of her queenship to maintain her power in her negotiations between the dukes.

Christine's use of Blanche de Castille as an example shows that Christine thought that queens should leave official ruling to men, even young ones. Unlike the queens of Scripture who represented abstract ideals of queenship, Blanche de Castille was part of the cultural memory in France. Thus Christine's use of "the very wise and kindly Queen of France, Blanche, the mother of Saint Louis" (271) as an example is important because of the similarities of her situation to Isabeau's. Unlike the other queens mentioned, Blanche was a foreign queen, and thus was a liminal figure, as was Isabeau. In addition, she was a regent for her infant son, who is mentioned both in Christine's identification of Blanche and in Christine's description of her peacemaking abilities.

Blanche depended on her son's natural kingship to legitimize her regency:

When the barons were discordant because of the queen's regency, didn't she take her son, still an infant, into her arms and, holding him in the midst of the barons, say: "Don't you see here your king? Do not do anything to make him displeased with you when he has reached the age of discretion." And so by her good judgment she appeased them (271).

The infant king was the son of a king and would grow up to be king. While Blanche was the wife of the late king and mother of the future king, he was their future ruler. While he was still an infant, she was his representative to the royal council. Eventually, he would approve her choices in ruling and punish those who did not follow her. According to Christine, it is this line of reasoning that caused the barons to accept Blanche's rule. It was through Blanche's status as mother and wife of the king and not due to legal mandate that she was able to make peace between the barons.





Christine detailed her vision of the gender-specific roles of the king and the queen in the body politic. In the *Livre des fais*, Charles V is the wise king who demonstrates his wisdom by making decisions that will be good for the kingdom. These decisions should coincide with the good of the people. He should build infrastructure, not overburden his people with taxes, and weight carefully the decision of whether or not to go to war. In the *epistre*, Christine outlined the duties of the virtuous queen, which including aid the wise king in making prudent decisions. Her role is to work for peace within the role court by reminding the king of his responsibility towards the people as well as by working to negotiate peace between the ruler and other lords. Throughout the *epistre*, Christine identified the queen's role in the court as equally important as the king's, and due to the premium that Christine places on peace, it is perhaps superior to the king's.

However, while Christine does critique Isabeau's rule as queen, it should be taken as a show of support and not as blanket criticism. Through her examples, Christine presents other channels through which Isabeau could claim power as queen: most particularly through her son, who could not rule due to his very young age.



## Conclusion

Christine clearly had a working relationship with the women in the court. Her letter of advice to the queen suggests that a professional relationship existed and unsolicited advice was possible. The *Livre des Trois Vertus*, while commissioned by the duke de Bourgogne, contained advice meant for his daughter and other women in positions of power. Christine, in writing to these women, developed a theoretical basis for the roles that they had been brought up to perform. Because of her particular position as a woman writer and an outsider to the French court, she was able to analyze these roles in a way that male writers had not and that she did not in her future political writings, which were mainly focused at men's political roles and actions.

Christine's interaction with the women of the French court was important to her development as a political writer. In fact, one can see the slow development of her standing in the French court through the writings discussed today. In the *querelle*, she debated with other humanists, who worked with the royal court and were well-respected intellectuals. While the queen was not directly involved in the *querelle*, Christine sent a dossier containing the *querelle's* documents to the queen. Three years later, Isabeau paid Christine for a copy of the *Cité des dames*. Christine's patronage relationship with Isabeau was not exclusive, however. Jean de Bourgogne, Isabeau's political rival, commissioned the *Trois Vertus*. After the *Trois Vertus*, Christine began writing political works directed towards men. In fact, her next work was a discussion of the body politic, dedicated to the *dauphin*.



The political role that Christine carved for queens was in fact one that women had been practicing for centuries. Christine's varied portrayals of Blanche de Castille show her perception of the queen's role. Blanche acted as regent during much of her son's life. In the *Cité des dames*, the *Livre des trois vertus*, and the *epistre a la royne*, Christine emphasized different characteristics of Blanche's use of power. In the *Cité des dames*, she used her virtuousness to accomplish her political goals, and in the *Trois vertus*, Christine emphasized her use of virtue in mediating. In the *epistre*, Christine shows how Blanche legitimizes her role as mediator by emphasizing her role as mother to the king.

The political problems of the queen's court were more complex than Christine could have seen in 1405. Isabeau's inability to create peace lies in the power triangle between Isabeau, Bourgogne and Orléans. Louis d'Orléans wanted the duke of Bourgogne to stop hindering his acquisition of power. After Bourgogne had Louis killed, Louis's young son, Charles d'Orléans wanted to avenge his father's death. However, Isabeau was not an objective bystander. She was placed in a defensive position by the fact that Jean de Bourgogne wanted the power that Isabeau was protecting for her eldest son. She therefore sided with Orléans in 1405, and with the Armagnacs during the civil war.

Even while Christine's gendered political theory provides the queen a role in government, it shows Christine's distance from modern feminism. While modern feminism wishes to eradicate gender difference to the extent that women should have the same roles in society as men, Christine accepted and used these differences to explain the function of society. However, Christine was not an apologist for the men to control society independent of her sex. Women had a responsibility to temper the political



decisions of men. She gave to medieval political thought a socially sanctioned way of thinking about women in political power: queens are peacemakers as a result of their virtue, not because it gives them specific political roles.





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## Appendix: Key Political Figures

**Charles VI** – le Bien-Aimé, le Fol. b. 1368. Eldest son of Charles V of France and Jeanne de Bourbon. He began having episodes of mental incapacity, perhaps schizophrenia, in 1393 and took months at a time for “absences.” He died in 1422.

**Isabeau de Bavière** -- b. 1370. Daughter of duke of Bavaria and Thaddea Visconti of Milan and queen consort of Charles VI. In 1402, she was given the official political power to negotiate between the royal dukes, and leadership of the royal council in 1403. In 1415, she became reliant on Jean de Bourgogne for political power. After the death of Charles VI, she was ignored and died in 1435.

**Louis, duc d’Orléans** – younger brother of Charles VI. He married Valentina Visconti of Milan. He engaged in power struggles with royal uncles, particularly with dukes de Bourgogne. Married son to comte d’Armagnac’s daughter. Jean de Bourgogne had him assassinated in 1407. His eldest son, Charles d’Orléans, who eventually became the famed poet, tried to avenge his father’s death.

**Philippe, duc de Bourgogne** – le Hardi. Brother of Charles V. Mentor and political advisor to queen. Died 1404.

**Jean, duc de Bourgogne** – Sans Peur. Son of Philippe de Bourgogne. Inherited the dukedom in 1404. Had Louis d’Orléans killed in 1407. Became enemy of most of the royal court by 1410. Married daughter to Louis de Guyenne. Died 1433.

**Louis, duc de Guyenne** – b. 1397. *Dauphin*. Married Marguerite de Bourgogne, daughter of Jean de Bourgogne in 1404. Began taking an active role in government in 1410, during which Jean de Bourgogne mentored him. Began to take an active political role in 1413. Died in December 1415.

**Charles VII** – b. 1403. 11<sup>th</sup> child of Charles VI and Isabeau. Became *dauphin* in 1417. With Jeanne d’Arc’s assistance, reclaimed French throne and crowned king of France in 1431.









